

Our Valley's veterans, including the 33,000 veterans that call California's 20th Congressional district home, hail from all backgrounds and represent what is great about our nation. The debt we owe to these selfless individuals is immeasurable and we must always deliver on the promises made to those who stand up to protect our freedom and values.

Every day we have the responsibility to assist our service members and it is my personal mission to help our Valley's veterans access the benefits they have earned and deserve. Since taking office, I have helped over 560 Valley veterans cut through red tape at the Veterans Administration (VA) or other federal agencies to access their health care, social security checks, and even medals. If you or a veteran you know is having difficulty with the VA or federal government, I encourage you to call my office in Fresno at (559) 495-1620.

Along with working with our veterans personally, I have fought to secure funding for programs and pass legislation that will benefit members of our armed services. One of the greatest achievements for our veterans can be found right here in our Valley. After we fought to secure funding and a location, I was able to join with local veterans and leaders to break ground on the first ever Veterans Home in Fresno County. This new home will serve over three hundred veterans and will create more than 400 jobs.

I have also supported legislation that boosts federal support for our veterans. The new Post 9-11 GI Bill, which took effect in August, restores the promise of a full, four-year college education for our returning soldiers. More than 475,000 veterans have signed up for these benefits with over 240,000 veterans already attending college this spring.

In our all volunteer army, many of our troops have served multiple tours of duty, with great strain on their families and substantial cost to their financial futures. In response, Congress provided special \$500 payments for every month the 185,000 service members and veterans were required to serve under stop-loss orders since 2001.

This year, we increased military pay 3.4 percent and expanded health benefits for members of our armed services and veterans. We are also building more military child care centers and better barracks and military family housing. With over a hundred thousand service members deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan today, the recognition of the sacrifice that military families make every day has never been more important.

For wounded veterans, Congress just enacted legislation to provide help to family members and other caregivers of disabled, ill or injured veterans, such as training, counseling, and respite care, and to eliminate copayments for catastrophically disabled veterans. Congress also provided family leave benefits for families of our wounded warriors.

On the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind. Let it be our pledge that when they return home, we leave no veteran behind.